

An Albertine Rift endemic in western Africa: first record of White-collared Oliveback *Nesocharis ansorgei* for Congo-Brazzaville

Vincent Delhaye-Prat^a and Jérôme Mokoko Ikonga^b

Un endémique du Rift albertin en Afrique de l'Ouest : première observation du Dos-vert à collier *Nesocharis ansorgei* au Congo-Brazzaville. Le 14 février 2014, trois Dos-verts à collier *Nesocharis ansorgei* mâles ont été photographiés à Bilinga, au sud-ouest du Congo-Brazzaville. C'est la première donnée pour le pays, d'une espèce qui n'était connue que du Rift albertin, avant sa découverte récente au nord de l'Angola.

On 14 February 2014 at 08.45 hrs, VD-P observed a small group of three estrildid finches at Bilinga, a few kilometres south of Dimonika Biosphere Reserve, Kouilou Department, south-west Congo-Brazzaville (04°28.988'S 12°14.850'E). Having visited Bilinga regularly over the previous three years during preparatory work for a photographic guide to the birds of the Kouilou area (Gonzalez-Dunia *et al.* 2014), he immediately realised that the species was one unknown to him and therefore suspected that it must be uncommon. The birds were perched in a tree on a hillside opposite Bilinga station, near the banks of the Loémé River; VD-P

was able to watch them for c.5 minutes and took several photographs (Figs. 1–2). The head was all black separated by a narrow white collar from the grey hindneck and yellowish-olive breast. The upperparts were yellow-olive with a yellower rump and uppertail-coverts; the rest of the underparts were soft grey. The tail was black.

After consulting a field guide (Borrow & Demey 2008) and JMI, it was discovered that the only species corresponding to the birds were olivebacks *Nesocharis*, of which only two species were known from western Africa: Grey-headed *N. capistrata* and Shelley's Oliveback *N. shelleyi*, neither of which had been recorded in Congo-Brazzaville



Figures 1–2. Male White-collared Olivebacks *Nesocharis ansorgei*, Bilinga, Congo-Brazzaville, 14 February 2014 (Vincent Delhaye-Prat)

Dos-verts à collier *Nesocharis ansorgei* mâles, Bilinga, Congo-Brazzaville, 14 février 2014 (Vincent Delhaye-Prat)

(Fry *et al.* 2004, Borrow & Demey 2008, Dowsett *et al.* 2014). Given that only the latter species has an entirely black head, with the rest of the plumage also being similar to the Bilinga birds, we concluded that they were probably Shelley's Olivebacks, which is restricted to the highlands of south-east Nigeria and south-west Cameroon, and on Bioko. However, Shelley's Oliveback possesses just a short white stripe on the neck-sides and a short tail, imparting a dumpy 'jizz', as illustrated in a recent photograph in Mills (2010), whereas the Bilinga birds had a complete white collar and a longer tail. Subsequent circulation of the photographs revealed that they were in fact White-collared Olivebacks *N. ansorgei*—a new species for Congo-Brazzaville. Curiously, all three birds had a yellowish-olive breast and were therefore males.

Interestingly, the species, which was previously known only from the Albertine Rift area in East Africa, has recently also been discovered in northern Angola (Mills & Vaz Pinto 2015). The three Angolan localities were at 790–980 m altitude, notably higher than the birds in Congo, as Bilinga is at just *c.*30 m altitude. It is, however, located within the forested Mayombe massif, where the tops lie at 670–760 m (Dowsett-Lemaire 2001) and several hills near Bilinga reach *c.*250 m. Of note is that nearby Dimonika Biosphere Reserve, one of Congo-Brazzaville's six Important Bird Areas, contains a small population of two montane species, Crossley's Ground Thrush *Geokichla* (= *Zoothera*) *crossleyi* and Pink-footed Puffback *Dryoscopus angolensis* (Dowsett-Lemaire 2001). It would be interesting to discover if White-collared Oliveback occurs at additional

sites between south-west Congo-Brazzaville and northern Angola.

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- ^a 1 Chemin de Hourrègue, 64121 Serres-Castet, France. E-mail: vdp.geo@hotmail.fr
- ^b BP 14537 Brazzaville, Congo. E-mail: jrmokoko@gmail.com
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